Update: Ongoing Inquiry into Melioidosis Illness at Tulane National Research Center

Late November 2014, two non-human primates in the breeding colony at the Tulane National Primate Research Center (TNPRC), a private research facility, became ill; one of the two was euthanized, the other one fully recovered. In mid- December 2014, samples submitted to the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) identified Burkholderia Pseudomallei as the causative agent. This strain of bacteria is not endemic in the US but was the subject of research at TNPRC. Because Burkholderia Pseudomallei is a tier 1 agent and the material was considered not in containment, the CDC and U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) initiated a joint investigation of TNPRC in January 2015. As part of the investigation conducted January 20-24, federal and state scientists visited the TNPRC site to conduct epidemiological study and to review lab practices to determine possible route of transmission.

Recently, one of the investigators fell ill with unspecific symptoms. A blood test was conducted and test results from Friday, February 6th indicated a presence of antibodies in the blood indicating some exposure to BURKHOLDERIA PSEUDOMALLEI. The investigator was discharged from the hospital Sunday and she is no longer sick. The person's travel history does include a visit to a region that may have provided an opportunity for exposure. Federal and state agencies are aggressively trying to determine if the illness was related to the facility visit or past travel.

The other members of the investigative team are being tested for possible exposure to the bacteria for baseline comparison and possible future diagnosis. This testing will provide some indication regarding route of transmission.

The CDC, USDA and the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA), are working with Tulane University as well as state and local officials to identify, isolate, mitigate and prevent further transmission of BURKHOLDERIA PSEUDOMALLEI within TNPRC. Environmental testing, including air, water, soil sampling, will guide remediation activities. Once samples are collected, it will take 1-2 weeks to obtain results.

Situational Update: Friday, February 13, 2015, as of 2pm CST

CDC:

-Samples taken this week from the federal investigator who tested positive for antibodies to the bacteria indicated a stable level of immune response, which leads CDC officials to believe the investigator was not infected at Tulane during the investigation in January but most likely during travel to a country where the bacteria is endemic. Further testing is necessary to confirm and will occur over the next several weeks.

-CDC officials have completed the fact-finding portion of their investigation into how the two non-human primates may have contracted the bacteria. CDC investigators will review notes and evidence over the next few weeks to see if a cause can be determined.

-Environmental samples submitted to CDC for testing will be tested over the coming days and results returned to state and parish officials.

-CDC testing of samples provided by Tulane of 42 non-human primates found antibodies to the bacteria in one additional animal which indicates exposure. The animal is healthy and not ill with Meliodiosis. CDC investigators are trying to understand how this animal may have contracted the bacteria.

Tulane:

-Continues to work with federal and state officials to determine how the non-human primates may have contracted the bacteria.

LA Department of Health and Hospitals:

-DHH has designated the Louisiana State Health Officer, State Epidemiologist, State Lab and Region 9 Regional Medical Director as department representatives on the Science and Technical Work Group established for this issue.

-DHH is organizing staff and equipment to obtain blood samples on Wednesday, February 18 from Tulane TPNRC staff.

Melioidosis, also called Whitmore's disease, is an infectious disease that can infect humans or animals and is treatable with antibiotics. The disease is caused by the bacterium *Burkholderia pseudomallei*.
It is predominately a disease of tropical climates, especially in Southeast Asia and northern Australia where it is widespread. The bacteria causing melioidosis are found in contaminated water and soil. It is spread to humans and animals through direct contact with the contaminated source. It is not known to spread from human to human or from animal to human.

CDC's role is to protect the health and safety of researchers and the public. For more information about melioidosis, visit http://www.cdc.gov/melioidosis/index.html. Questions regarding the investigation and remediation activities should be directed to CDC (Jason McDonald) at 404-387-3660. Questions regarding the TPNRC facility should be directed to Tulane (Mike Strecker) at 504-512-1347. All other questions or concerns should be directed to Mike Steele at Mike.Steele@La.gov .

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